



She's Got Next:

Creating Change for Michigan's Girls and Women in Sports

A report of recommendations in recognition
of the 50th Anniversary of Title IX

A Michigan Women in Sports Task Force Report, June 2022



June 22, 2022

Dear Governor Whitmer:

Thank you for the opportunity to chair Michigan's Women in Sports Task Force. We submit this, the Task Force's concluding report, to you as our nation marks the 50th anniversary of the landmark federal legislation of Title IX. We recognize the progress our country has made since its passage, but also that the full vision of Title IX has not been realized equally for everyone. It is our hope that this report of fact-based, data-driven recommendations serves as a guide to improve equity and opportunity for girls and women in sports and subsequent leadership across our society.

I am thankful to the team of Michigan sports leaders, supported by national experts and many others, who have worked countless hours, days, weeks and months over the past three years to research, envision and write this report. They are barrier-breakers, history makers, and change agents. They challenge the status quo and work for a brighter future for all girls and women, and they are the reason that the report's recommendations are more than good ideas. They are calls to action.

The recommendations encapsulate legislation, policies, investments and programs for the state, the sports industry, the private sector and the general public. And each and every one of those sectors stands to benefit from their implementation, and in countless ways. Providing opportunities for girls and women in sports bolsters their potential, our communities, and the state's economy. Let there be no doubt that what is good for girls and women is good for the state of Michigan.

Thank you again for creating and supporting the work of the Task Force. We submit this report with fervent hope that it honors those who have come before us in this work and motivates those who will continue it into the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jocelyn Benson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Jocelyn Benson

Chair, Women in Sports Task Force
Secretary of State, State of Michigan





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INTRODUCTION

Women and girls of all backgrounds derive countless benefits from opportunities to play sports. Such benefits include but are not limited to lessons in confidence, courage, resilience, perseverance, and gains in physical health and psychological well-being. Sports participation is also a factor in women accessing and succeeding in leadership positions across a variety of sectors, including as elected officials.^{1,2} Nearly 95% of women in C-suite positions have played sports, and their leadership has led to notable economic, social and political progress. Despite the myriad of personal and professional benefits of being involved in sports, inequities and disparities exist in the sport opportunities and experiences of girls and women throughout the state of Michigan. To address these inequities and to develop strategies to support and promote opportunities in Michigan for girls and women in sports, Governor Gretchen Whitmer created the Michigan Women in Sports Task Force three years ago via Executive Order 2019-16.



Increasing opportunities for girls and women in sports has far-reaching implications for society in general and advancing women leaders in particular. For instance, women leaders positively impact organizational and community cultures, and their contributions have impacted business bottom lines. The diversity of thought and leadership characteristics that women bring, in contrast to traditional masculine models, are critical for future success of organizations.⁴ When women lead, decisions are more inclusive and representative, income equality increases, companies are more profitable, and our communities improve.³ Compared with men at the same level, women do more to support their teams and advance diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts - which are especially important factors for younger generations in the workforce.⁴ Increasing gender diversity of leadership teams leads to higher sales and greater returns to shareholders. Women's leadership increases access to education and healthcare, leading to enhanced quality of life in our neighborhoods, communities, and the state. Valuing the differences that women contribute to the workforce cannot be overstated for addressing the challenges of a changing workforce. Therefore, it is critical for the future of Michigan that girls and women are provided with high quality and equitable opportunities to participate in sports as athletes, coaches, administrators and executives at all levels and in all sectors of this industry.

The 1972 passing of Federal Title IX legislation increased opportunities and provided protections for girls and women in education-based athletics and impacted non-school based sports as well. Nonetheless, 50 years later, girls and women continue to receive fewer opportunities in sports. They encounter lower levels of investment, training resources, and safety assurances than their male counterparts – disparities that are further stratified by income and race. This parallels the imbalance of women's leadership in college sports. When women succeed as professional or elite athletes, they often meet a glass ceiling and a substantial pay gap – barriers that extend to leadership positions with professional leagues and teams, as well as in sports agencies, clothing companies, marketing firms, and others. These inequities in access and



opportunities prevent girls and women in Michigan from fully accessing the benefits in leadership development that sports can provide – to the detriment of not only these girls and women, but also the state, which stands to gain from their talents and leadership.

Under the Governor's directive, the Michigan Women in Sports Task Force was charged with:

- Assessing the history of and current landscape for girls and women in sports in Michigan
- Developing recommendations for legislation, policies, investments, and programs to support and promote opportunities in Michigan for girls and women in sports at the youth, high school, and collegiate level, and expand professional opportunities for women leaders in sports, both on and off the spaces of competition
- Providing information, advice or other actions to take as requested by the governor
- Submitting a final report to the governor detailing its initial findings and recommendations

To accomplish these tasks, the Task Force met quarterly between 2019-2022 to identify the challenges and issues impacting girls' and women's sport opportunities and experiences; discuss best practices; brainstorm ideas and solutions unique to Michigan; and hear testimonials from key constituents. For additional insight, the Task Force also travelled to participate in site visits locally and around the country. Lastly, to obtain the necessary data to guide this process, the Task Force commissioned research to assess our state's sports environment. This report is the culmination of their work to change the game for Michigan's girls and women in sports.



TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP

The Task Force is comprised of 15 passionate, Michigan change-makers, researchers, and barrier breakers committed to improving sports opportunities and the landscape for women and girls. They have been supported by an Advisory Council consisting of dedicated leaders in sports from across the nation. Members work across all levels of sports and athletics, in the private, non-profit and public sectors, and are recognized experts in the industry. Since inception, the Task Force has met quarterly to discuss best practices, brainstorm, and hear athlete and leader statements; participated in site visits around the country to understand the national environment; and conducted research to assess Michigan's sports landscape.

Task Force Members:

- Jocelyn Benson (chair), Secretary of State, State of Michigan
- Penny Allen-Cook, Commissioner, Michigan Intercollegiate Athletic Association
- Ketra Armstrong, Ph.D., Professor of Sport Management, Director of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion; Director, Center for Race & Ethnicity in Sport, School of Kinesiology, University of Michigan
- Kathy Beauregard, Director of Athletics (retired), Western Michigan University
- Keri Becker, Director of Athletics, Grand Valley State University
- Lorin Cartwright, MS, ATC, Athletic Training and Sport Management Consultant/Textbook Author
- Carolyn Cassin, President & CEO, Michigan Women Forward
- Ramona Cox, Ph.D., Director, The Champions Network™, Doc Wayne
- Cali Crawford, Athletic Director, Schoolcraft College
- Joanne Gerstner, Brandt Fellow Sports Journalist in Residence, Michigan State University
- Jennifer Granger, Community Philanthropist
- Mike Guswiler, President, West Michigan Sports Commission
- Carol Hutchins, Head Coach, Softball, University of Michigan
- Samantha Mullet, Offensive Coordinator, Varsity Football, Bear Lake Schools
- Erika Swilley, Vice President, Community and Social Responsibility, Detroit Pistons

Advisory Council Members:

- Deborah Antoine, Ph.D., CEO, Women's Sports Foundation
- Neena Chaudhry, General Counsel and Senior Advisor for Education, National Women's Law Center
- Judith Brown Clarke, Vice President for Equity & Inclusion and Chief Diversity Officer, Stony Brook University and Health System
- Daniel Gould, Ph.D., Professor, Kinesiology, Director, Institute for the Study of Youth Sports (ISYS), Michigan State University
- Richard Lapchick, Ph.D., Founder & Director, The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport/Professor, University of Central Florida/Author
- Heather Lyke, Director of Athletics, University of Pittsburgh
- Suzy Merchant, Head Coach, Women's Basketball, Michigan State University
- Heather Mitts Feeley, former US Soccer Olympian, CEO, Gold Medal Mindset
- Patti Phillips, CEO, Women Leaders in College Sports
- Scott Pioli, NFL Analyst, NFL Network
- Sam Rapoport, Senior Director, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, National Football League
- Meg Seng, Athletic Director, Greenhills School
- Renee Tirado, Equity and Inclusion Thought Leader
- Mark Uyl, Executive Director, Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA)
- Mary Wilson, Board Chair & Life Trustee, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation

Executive Director: Michele Lewis Watts, Ph.D., She Equity Officer, Woods & Watts Effect

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The Task Force thanks the following for its support:

Representatives and affiliates of the Women's Sports Foundation (WSF): Karen Issokon-Silver, MPH, Vice President, Research & Evaluation; Sarah Axelson, MPA, Senior Director, Advocacy; Ellen J. Staurowsky, EdD, Professor, Sport Management, Drexel University, WSF Researcher;

Staff and faculty affiliates of the University of Michigan Institute for Research on Women and Gender (IRWG): Jocelyn Stith, PhD, Director of Research, Development, IRWG; Lilia Cortina, PhD, Professor of Psychology, Women's Studies, and Management & Organizations; Julia Seng, PhD, Professor & Associate Dean for Strategic Affairs; Department of Systems, Populations and Leadership; Philip Veliz, PhD, Assistant Research Professor, Associate Director of the Sport, Health, and Activity Research and Policy Center;

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ASSESSING THE SPORTS LANDSCAPE

The Task Force's first goal was to assess both the history and current state of sports for girls and women in Michigan to identify challenges and opportunities. Members collected testimonials from current Michigan athletes, coaches, and administrators; participated in observational site visits; met with sports leaders and executives; and conducted original primary and secondary research. Dr. Ketra Armstrong of University of Michigan and Dr. Daniel Gould of Michigan State University Institute for the Study of Youth Sports, led the research collection with the aim of understanding the status and experiences of women and girls in sports in Michigan, as athletes, coaches, athletic directors and sports executives.

The Task Force developed and adopted the first report, *Women in Sport Leadership: Perils, Possibilities and Pathways*, which outlines the barriers, inequities, and glass ceiling that women experience relative to their sport leadership aspirations. More than 560 Michigan men and women leaders completed a survey that identified factors impacting women's sport leadership opportunities and experiences. The participants worked in various sectors, ranging from community to professional sports, and settings that consisted of male and female sports (rather than settings for male sports only or female sports only). The participants resided in various counties throughout the state of Michigan, notably Washtenaw and Wayne, as well as Kent, Ottawa, Oakland, and Ingham counties, and represented a wide array of positions – as coaches, directors, administrators, and other roles. In addition to quantitative data provided, participants offered additional insight through open-ended qualitative comments and responses.

This research revealed the prevalence of gender biases, gender inequity, unfair treatment as women and due to their intersecting identities (such as their age, race or

Women in Sport Leadership: Perils, Possibilities and Pathways Survey Respondents Profile:

- 55% women, 45% men
- 90% White/Caucasian
- ~ 50% Master's Degrees
- 93% of the women and 98% of the men were former or current athletes
- 48% of the women and 65% of men employed by an NCAA school
- 15% of women and 22% of the men employed in high school sports settings.

ethnicity, sexual orientation, family or marital status, and others), lack of a supportive organizational culture, a glass ceiling impeding their career trajectory, and a host of individual, group, and system level barriers. One of the most notable outcomes of this study was its illustration of the varied and significantly different perspectives shared by women and men sport leaders throughout the state. Further, sport organizational cultures of masculinity and the pervasiveness of gender inequity significantly and adversely impacted the women's sport career satisfaction and their work-related well-being, even as they proudly served in their roles.

The Institute for the Study of Youth Sports at Michigan State University compiled and presented two reports to the Task Force: [*The Status of High School Girls' Sport Participation: A Report Compiled for the State of Michigan Women in Sports Task Force*](#), and [*The Status of High School Girls' Sport Participation Phase 2: A Report Compiled for the State of Michigan Women in Sports Task Force*](#), focused on

understanding the current status of sport participation for girls in Michigan. The Phase 1 report used data provided by the Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA) and supplemental information from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) database to examine how girls' sport participation varied relative to several contextual factors: school class size, socioeconomic status (SES), and geographic setting. The Phase 2 report compared girls' high school sport participation by geographic region across Michigan. It included visual mapping of that data and gender comparison of the percentage of scholastic sport participants by previously identified contextual factors.

The key findings of these two reports suggested that where a girl lives and the socio-economic status (SES) of her school have much to do with the likelihood that she will participate in high school sports. Girls living in suburban areas and cities and who attend schools with more students who qualify for a higher percentage of free and reduced lunch (low SES) are less likely to participate in high school sports. In contrast, girls from towns and rural areas and who attend higher SES schools are more likely to participate in high school sports. Further, where a girl lives in terms of her specific geographic region (e.g., Upper, West Central, Detroit Metro) also impacts her likelihood of sport participation. Girls in more under-resourced communities such as those situated in city settings, in low SES schools, and certain regions (Metro Detroit and Upper Peninsula) may experience a more significant and compounded disadvantage in terms of the quantity and quality of their participation.

Task Force researchers concluded there is still much work to be done to enable women and girls to reach their fullest potential as athletes and leaders on and off the field. Highlights of their findings include:

- Gender disparity in sports participation and opportunity starts at an early age and continues through adulthood.
- Socioeconomic status and geography negatively impact girls' participation rates.
- College women student-athletes often receive less investment in terms of funding, visibility, and institutional support.
- Women are underrepresented for professional sports teams and athletes, and in sports leadership at the collegiate/university levels including in coaching.
- Gender bias and discrimination, "glass ceilings," and an "old boys club" culture still exist in the workplace.

Finally, Edward Elliot conducted qualitative research for the Task Force presented in a report titled [*Perspectives from Colleges and Universities in Michigan on Women in Sports*](#), which documented several personal experiences and observations from women currently working and participating in collegiate athletics at Michigan public universities. Through in-depth interviews with over 30 women and men from five different NCAA colleges (Divisions I, II and III), he identified several key existing challenges along with policies, initiatives, and actions that were working well for women in sports.

Administrators and coaches indicated a bias towards hiring and promoting men coaches and staff and acknowledged the pressure women are under in terms of work-life balance. Some "older men" were identified as holding back athletic departments from embracing a more positive culture towards women. The main issue raised by student-athletes concerned the athletic department's culture and the stigma that women's sports were "inferior" to men's. Other issues such as resources, access to facilities, coaching preferences, and mental health were also discussed as factors with a disproportionate impact

on women student-athletes. On the positive side, networks, in particular women-only networks, were seen as an invaluable tool for providing support for women in sport. Additionally, the situation appears to be markedly better for women student-athletes than for women administrators and coaches.

Upon receiving and reviewing the above commissioned research, the Task Force published a summary of the findings and recommendations: [Michigan Task Force on Women in Sports: Research Report](#). The Task Force then met to explore and develop potential solutions to the issues raised and used the major takeaways on the status of women and girls in sports in the state to inform the final recommendations to the Governor on how to increase opportunities and representation for women and girls in sports across Michigan.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The comprehensive process the Task Force engaged in (i.e., primary and secondary research, qualitative and quantitative measures, information from local, national, and international resources, etc.) yielded rich and valuable insight that informed the recommendations for Michiganders to increase the number of girls and women who participate in sports and grow as athletes and develop as leaders. The Task Force narrowed the content revealed in the volume of research findings and hundreds of hours of informed discussions and debates into three broad separate but related strategies addressing legislation, policies, programs, and investments. The over-arching sentiment of the Task Force is that our systems, structures, policies, and people must change and be held accountable to drive and sustain equity for our girls and women in all sectors and domains of Michigan sports.

Recommendation 1: Modernize and expand upon Federal Title IX requirements to increase protections, compliance, and accountability.

Title IX of the 1964 Civil Rights Act (as amended under the Educational Amendments of 1972) is perhaps best known for requiring that educational institutions provide girls, who had historically been underrepresented and underserved, with equal opportunity to participate in athletic activities and other benefits and opportunities related to participation. “Dear Colleague” letters and policy guidance from the U.S. Department of Education helped educational institutions understand how to apply the law. In the 50 years since the passing of Title IX, the needs of women and girls have evolved. Task Force research revealed many instances in which a lack of application of the law and accountability sustained the problems associated with gender inequity. As such, the Task Force explored plausible ways in which the state could improve upon compliance and ensure enforcement and accountability for noncompliance with the basic requirements of Title IX.

The Task Force also concluded that, while great strides have been made since its adoption 50 years ago, Title IX has fallen short of achieving its equity goals in numerous ways. Gender disparity in sports participation and opportunities starts at an early age and continues through adulthood.⁵ At the K-12 level, girls in Michigan participate in athletics at lower rates than boys. Despite the fact that every school district must have a Title IX Coordinator who has distinct responsibilities for protection, education, investigation and resolutions, many school-age athletes and their parents are not aware of Title IX and

Title IX of the Education Amendments

“No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”

the requirements, thus leaving many not knowing their rights nor receiving the full benefits of the law. At the college/university level, as women progress in sports as athletes and leaders, they suffer from gender bias and underinvestment – both of which are the antithesis of what Title IX seeks to accomplish.

In order to be effective, school and athletic personnel must have a thorough understanding of Title IX protections, a commitment to compliance, and an accountability for noncompliance. They also require thoughtful and strategic planning to develop and implement policies designed to ensure compliance with the Title IX statute, its supporting regulations, and the extensive set of guidances issued over the years by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR), the federal agency charged with the responsibility of enforcing the law.⁶ Currently, the punishment for Title IX violations by organizations is losing their federal funding. Yet no school has ever lost federal funding even when violations have been found. Warnings and basic corrective actions have been the typical and ineffective repercussions of Title IX violations.

The Michigan Department of Education lists the roles and responsibilities of Title IX coordinators and school districts but lacks a mandatory training requirement for coordinators or school personnel, including athletics staff. The submission of annual reports to district superintendents is a requirement, but there is no requirement that the reports are to be shared publicly, which would increase the transparency of this process. Further, there are no clear sanctions at the state level for Title IX violations.

At universities and colleges in Michigan, there are fewer women student-athletes than men student-athletes on average. Moreover, women student-athletes often receive less institutional investment in terms of funding, visibility, and support for their sport participation.⁹ All co-educational (i.e., mixed gender) postsecondary institutions that receive Title IV funding (i.e., those that participate in federal student aid programs) and that have an intercollegiate athletics program are required by the U.S. Department of Education to submit an annual Equities in Athletics Disclosure Act (EADA) report with data on athletic participation, staffing, revenues and expenses by gender. The EADA data are available to the public, which increases transparency; however, the data may not address compliance or accountability related to Title IX. No such data or report equivalent to the EADA exists for K-12 educational institutions. These composite conditions present a distinct responsibility and unique opportunity for the state of Michigan to be more proactive and accountable to the ideals embedded in the law and the spirit of Title IX.

[The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport](#) (TIDES), led by Task Force advisor Dr. Richard Lapchick, annually releases a “report card” on the status of the gender and race composition among staff in most of the professional and amateur sports and sporting organizations in the United States. Leagues, sports media, colleges and international sports are evaluated. Mirroring this report for Michigan's K-12 schools and collegiate athletic teams will increase public transparency and organizational accountability and will establish metrics for meaningful change.

The Task Force concluded that new and expanded laws, policies, training, and monitoring are needed to impact the understanding, implementation and reporting of Title IX throughout the state of Michigan. Other states have adopted such measures. For example, Connecticut has a complementary anti-discrimination state law (Chapter 164, Section 10-15c) and lists all school district Title IX coordinators, annual training dates, and related information in multiple languages on their state's website. The state of California (SB 1375) created new information requirements for Title IX coordinators because research showed that many schools were failing to provide required information for students. Title IX can be elevated in Michigan through similar tactics to increase transparency, hold organizations accountable, and provide enforcement mechanisms.



Finally, the Task Force supported the idea of establishing a state governing body or organization empowered to coordinate Title IX efforts across departments, councils and commissions to establish priorities, create and enforce policy, provide program funding, engage stakeholders, and conduct monitoring and evaluation. Governance models from other countries offer examples that can be adapted for Michigan to grow and develop grassroots sports and get more girls active. For example, Norway, which has one of the highest participation rates for girls and women, addresses socio-economic gender disparities through policy as a pre-cursor for creating change in sports.¹⁰ Australia's Department of Health launched a campaign to promote women in sports and provide information on how to get involved in sport. Likewise, Michigan's Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, Labor and Economic Opportunity, the Office of Civil Rights, and the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness can play a coordinated and significant role to improve access and equity for girls and women in sports.

Additional tactical recommendations include:

- Create annual Governor's Awards to recognize educational institutions excelling in Title IX compliance and transparency
- Create a required certification process that provides a proactive lens for both preventing and addressing Title IX concerns
- Mandate on-campus Title IX review committees, spot checks and regular audits for all K-12 schools and colleges and universities
- Use analysis of EADA reports and data as a trigger for Title IX reviews at colleges; create more accountability by creating incentives and penalties for ratings
- Build awareness and understanding for the full scope of Title IX legislation through targeted campaigns
- Work with partners, such as the MHSAA and other governing bodies, to increase Title IX training for school administrators, coaches and athletes
- Incentivize K-12 institutions to focus on gender equity in educational athletics



Recommendation 2: Invest in pathways for Michigan girls and women to play, work, and lead in sports in Michigan.

Given the impact of athletic participation on widening pathways to successful leadership in other spheres, Michigan must prioritize providing more opportunities for girls to play sports, and for women to coach, work, and lead in the sports industry.

First, the Task Force's research shows that ensuring girls growing up in Michigan have an equal opportunity to participate in high quality physical activity and sports will increase their desire to work in sports as coaches, and other leadership positions. Moreover, increasing the number of women who have access to athletic opportunities has implications beyond sport as it often translates into more women leaders in every industry. Therefore, concerted efforts by sports entities, educational institutions, non-



profit organizations, and others are needed to nurture and advance talented girls and women and connect them with playing and career-building opportunities.

The gender disparity in sport leadership positions is not due to a lack of talent, but rather systemic gender-based and social barriers to athletic opportunities at the amateur, professional and elite levels of sport. Therefore, it is not enough to just have more women enter leadership spaces; we must also provide continual support throughout their pathways for success and career advancement. As the Task Force research poignantly illustrated, we must change the culture and the 'gendering' of workplaces for women to fully thrive and contribute in meaningful ways. Intentional, multi-layered approaches are

needed to inform, inspire and support women's entry and advancement throughout sports. This is especially true for underrepresented and under-resourced girls and women.

The Task Force research illuminated a number of factors to consider when trying to invest in athletics as a pathway to leadership. For instance, it was revealed that the setting a girl lives in and the socioeconomic status (SES) of her school are related to the likelihood that she will participate in high school sports.⁷ Girls living in suburban areas and cities and who attend schools with a higher percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch (low SES) are less likely to participate in high school sports. In contrast, girls from towns and rural areas and who attend higher SES schools are more likely to participate. Further, the part of Michigan where a girl lives is also related to her school sports participation.⁸ Girls in more under-resourced communities such as those situated in city settings, in low SES schools, and certain regions (Metro Detroit and Upper Peninsula) may experience a more significant, compounding disadvantage in terms of quantity and quality of participation. Girls in the Detroit area are 11% less likely to play scholastic athletics compared to girls in other areas. This means that investment in girls' participation needs to be targeted to have the greatest impact on their leadership potential, especially for girls that are disadvantaged.

The Task Force research also unveiled a few other caveats and nuances to consider about the structure of sports/athletics when trying to invest in them as a pathway to leadership for girls and women. For example, school sports teams are often limited by roster sizes, facilities and a shortage of officials, which means that out-of-school activities are important spaces for girls to play and compete. Currently, data are not readily available on the plethora of club, travel, recreational and other non-school-based athletic programs, indicating a need for additional research. Further, these programs may be loosely monitored or have low accountability to a governing body. Ensuring that all programs serving girls are best-practiced is critically important. Because girls are socialized differently, have different physical development, and derive different benefits from sports than boys, gender-specific models of play, training and coaching are necessary to engage them in participation and encourage their persistent involvement.

Leading Programs

The MHSAA Women In Sports Leadership Conference is the first, largest and longest-running conference of its type in the country. The conference is open to students and adults interested in becoming a high school coach, administrator, official or athletic trainer. Held in Lansing every other year, the conference includes keynote presentations, expert-led workshops, an awards banquet, and physical activity sessions.

The Academy for Sport Leadership champions, educates, and inspires young women to pursue the coaching profession and other sport leadership positions to reverse the declining number of women in these domains. Through their Future Coaches Camp, Athletic Administration Internships and the TASL Alumnae Network, they prepare young women for leadership positions in the world of sports.

The Task Force developed several actionable items to increase and support girls' participation in sports as a pathway to leadership:

- Educate important stakeholders on gender bias and systemic barriers in sport, as well as actionable solutions
- Recognize high performing, best practices programs and organizations via Governor's Awards that can be replicated (See [Michigan Task Force on Women in Sports: Research Report](#) for exemplary programs.)
- Earmark state funding or use pass through grants for local government recreation centers to support initiatives and actions toward gender equity and girl-specific sport-related programming
- Create campaigns targeted to girls, parents and administrators that motivate and celebrate girls' and women's involvement in sport
- Create a tracking system for out-of-school participation
- Engage Michigan Department of Education to ensure enforcement of physical education curriculums/standards and adoption of recess policies, both which are gateways to athletic participation
- Designate "safe spaces" for girls to play without boys, that are physically secure and have background-checked and properly trained staff

The Task Force also found overwhelming research to demonstrate that young girls who play sports become women who work in sports and leaders in every aspect of society. However, there is a need to help women overcome barriers to career advancement. Increasing the number of women contenders for leadership positions can be achieved by raising the visibility of women candidates, improving

knowledge of available positions, and ensuring position readiness. [Women Leaders in College Sports](#) addresses these factors directly by developing, connecting, and advancing women working in college sports and beyond. They do this by training, mentoring, and promoting women leaders, while also educating, engaging and challenging leaders to adopt and utilize diverse and equitable hiring practices. Currently, these activities are taking place in Michigan through various networks, organizations, and colleges and universities, but there is a lack of connectivity and collaboration. Centralizing these efforts in a statewide sports leadership network could expand opportunities for mentorship and sponsorship by senior women and men leaders – both of which are key factors for embracing and leveraging gender diversity.

As mentioned previously, gender bias is underlying many of the talent pipeline issues, both for sport participation and sport employment. Task Force research findings indicated that women experience "glass ceilings" and an "old boys club" culture.⁵ These social attitudes remain a significant hurdle to entry, advancement, and equitable pay for women in coaching, administration and executive leadership in sports. Required education at the highest levels and new employment policies are needed to overcome overt discrimination and unconscious biases within recruiting and hiring. Strategies such as blind interviewing, objective measures, focusing on strengths and talents, and well-trained interview panels help to eliminate the subjectivity that disadvantages women with consequences such as hiring less qualified men over women candidates.⁹

The Return on Investment

GR8 Girls gives K-8 girls at Grand Rapids Public Schools no-cost access to positive after-school sports experiences. In 2021, more than 2,000 girls participated, improving their confidence, getting healthier, and gaining skills for the workplace.

EY, the professional services firm formerly known as Ernst & Young, conducted groundbreaking research on the relationship between sports participation and C-suite women. They have since launched EY Athlete Programs and EY Women Athletes Business Network to support women athletes who have outstanding leadership potential and to provide guidance on their transition into the business world.

Sport England advertised "This Girl Can" campaign, which led to an estimated 1.6 million women starting or restarting exercise as a result of the numerous messages shared. Partner organizations also created events in support of the campaign, which was funded by England's National Lottery.

Pay equity audits, compensation practices, leadership buy-in, and education on cultural competency, diversity, equity, and inclusion are also necessary steps to address the gender biases that many women experience.

Below are other tactics to invest in the talent and advance the pathways to leadership for women.

- Identify, connect to and consult with search firms that specialize in identifying women leaders and executives for sports organizations
- Help create partnerships between universities' academic major programs and sports organizations to mentor and nurture talent for careers in sports
- Offer paid (and for credit) internship programs that target and cultivate entry-level women employees
- Provide scholarships supported by leaders and organizations to incentivize and reward women with sports industry aspirations
- Promote business and operations roles/positions among women to reduce the concentration of women in supportive roles that traditionally pay less
- Offer information on relevant trainings (gender equity, unconscious-bias, hiring and employment best practices, etc.).



CHALLENGING THE STATUS QUO

The hiring process for college athletic directors is often quite different compared to other university positions despite the highly visible nature of the job and reporting to the school president or other high-ranking administrator. Unlike academic positions that typically have public presentations or interviews, athletic directors are often hired with no public knowledge of the final candidates. These positions are often filled quickly, suggesting a favored short list of candidates had already been determined. Additionally, these positions are handled with the utilization of search firms, which have no requirements for following school recruitment or hiring practices. While not well documented, the role of relationships, influencers (i.e., athletic department donors), and other power brokers often leave women candidates out of the conversations, considerations, and overall hiring process. Legal requirements, advocating for transparency, and increasing objectivity can lead to a more gender inclusive hiring process at universities and colleges.

Recommendation 3: Encourage Michiganders to support and invest in future opportunities and access for girls and women at all levels of sports.

Improving the sport opportunities and experiences for girls and women in Michigan will take a comprehensive, collaborative, and integrated effort to challenge the stereotypes and improve the culture of support and investment for girls and women in sport. Stakeholders in and outside of sport can all have a role in changing the landscape and providing solutions. This process can begin by increasing the visibility of the opportunities and obstacles for women and girls in sports across the state. Visible and tangible support from the public and private sectors for girls and women who are athletes and sport leaders sends a signal of their importance. Messaging to the public can include a range of options, from the creation of major state promotional campaigns encouraging physical activity in sport, to debunking negative gender stereotypes, to informational initiatives that increase knowledge of sport programming best practices. A dedicated marketing campaign (via print, electronic, and personal means) will play a critical role in positioning girls and women as viable constituents (i.e., producers, consumers, and leaders) in and of Michigan sports.

Although marketing will play a pivotal role in advancing the prominence of girls and women in sport, real and sustainable change for gender equity in sports will require financial support. The Task Force members believe that generating statewide financial support is not only possible, but critical, to operationalizing these recommendations. One proven fundraising method is Michigan's specialty cause license plate program. Over the past two decades, millions of dollars have been collectively raised for universities and other worthy initiatives such as organ donation and water quality. Currently, the charitable arms of the Detroit Lions, Tigers, Red Wings, and Pistons have "fundraising plates." Certainly, funding the futures of our daughters, sisters, mothers, and aunts to impact leadership in our state is also a worthy cause.



Similar to the Michigan School Aid Fund supported by the Michigan Lottery, additional statewide funding initiatives could include redistributing leisure and selective excise and sales tax dollars to fund these recommendations and other approved tactics. For example, the states of New York and Ohio allocate a portion of the state tax revenue from sports betting to youth sports programs. In New York, a fixed annual amount of \$5 million from mobile sports betting tax revenue will be distributed for youth sports through grants.¹¹ In Ohio, 98% of sport-gaming tax revenue will flow to a fund that supports public and private schools, and half of the money must be spent on interscholastic sports and extra-curricular activities.¹¹

Michigan has a great history of producing elite women athletes, but they are often celebrated as a novelty or only for a few days every few years during the Olympic Games. Michigan colleges and universities have produced a wide array of national champions at various levels in basketball, field hockey, gymnastics, cross country, softball and more. Task Force member Carol Hutchins, head softball coach at University of Michigan and a Michigan State graduate, is the winningest softball coach in NCAA history, breaking the record in early 2022. Further, the history of

women from the state excelling in the Olympics starts more than 100 years ago with Margaret Woodbridge Pressley winning gold in swimming and continues to 2022 Winter Olympic medalists Madison Hubbell (ice dance) and Megan Keller and Abby Roque (hockey), with numerous winners in the years in between.

The Task Force also recognized that Detroit is one of the few thriving professional sports markets without a professional women's team and is uniquely poised to support one. The Detroit Shock, Detroit's former women's professional basketball (WNBA) team, were 3-time world champions, winning their first national championship in 2003 as the first team in American pro sports to go from having the worst record in the league to champions the following season. One of their games broke an attendance record for the league. Today, the Detroit City Football Club (FC), Ann Arbor FC, Flint City AFC, Midwest United FC and Kalamazoo FC play in a pre-professional women's soccer league and are building a strong fan base to support a professional women's soccer team in Michigan. Leadership from the state can bring stakeholders together to enable needed investments to pave the way for professional women's sports teams.



For example, state leaders can promote innovative models of team ownership, business strategies, marketing and fandom that would elevate opportunities for women athletes at the professional level while capitalizing on the national growth of popular sports played by women. The Angel City Football Club in Los Angeles is a National Women's Soccer League expansion team that began play in 2022 with a mission to have an impact on and off the field. The four co-founding owners are highly successful women supported by more than 100 like-minded men, women and girl investors. Additionally, the front office is majority women. Their mission, activities, and ownership model reflect their desired social impact and the change they want to see for women's sports. Angel City FC provides inspiration for Michigan to forge new relationships and create models that reflect our needs and goals and our value of girls and women in sport.

Additional ideas to market, finance, and thus, elevate access and opportunities for girls and women at all levels of sport include:

- Elevate the promotion and celebration of National Girls and Women in Sports Day, held annually in February, throughout Michigan with coordinated events, activities and messages
- Use Women's History Month to tell stories of Michigan girls and women's sports accomplishments at all levels
- Campaign for more women to enter the Michigan Sports Hall of Fame in all categories
- Highlight and expand opportunities for girls and young women to learn about careers in sports through local and regional career days, workshops, and other programs

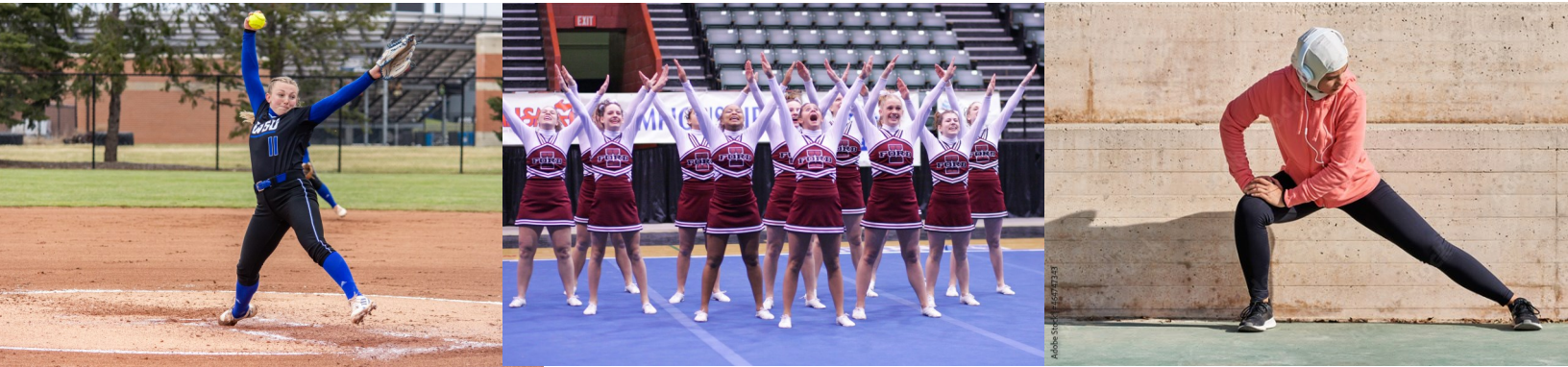


CONCLUSION

The Michigan Task Force on Women in Sports devoted the last three years to better understanding how Michigan could lead the nation in creating equitable opportunities for our state's girls and women to work, play and lead in every sector and domain of sport. The recommendations, if adopted and implemented, will have long-term benefits for every Michigander. State and national research is clear: girls and women who play sports go on to become leaders in sports and beyond, and their leadership creates positive changes for our state, our country, and our world.

The research is also clear that girls and women need equitable opportunities to participate in sports to become the leaders we need for Michigan. Title IX guarantees their rights to gender equity, but those rights need to be promoted and protected and individuals and organizations with legal responsibilities need to be held accountable to ensuring them. Engaging stakeholders across public, private and non-profit sectors to elevate and support girls and women's involvement in sports will have exponentially positive impacts on our state. Intentional investment in the athletic participation and career pathways of

girls and women at all levels of sport will produce highly skilled leaders, entrepreneurs, and mentors helping to prepare the next generation. The coordination and implementation of the strategies suggested by the Task Force will increase gender equity, inspire and empower our girls and women in their sport pursuits and in their lives beyond sports, and thus, expand the talent pool to enrich the overall culture and productivity of our state. When women are empowered, communities change and thrive. Michigan, it's time to thrive!



NEXT STEPS

The formulation of this Task Force and the creation of this report with recommendations and suggestions for policies and practices constitute an important first step in improving the opportunities and experiences for girls and women in sport. This report sets the stage and offers a solid foundation for the work that needs to take place to create real and sustainable change for Michigan's girls and women.

Notwithstanding the significant progress of this groundbreaking Task Force endeavor, more information on the Michigan sports landscape is needed that was not covered in depth by the research undertaken or the scope of the Task Force. Ongoing evaluation of girls and women's experiences in sport are important next steps for future work. This should include but is not limited to, as recommended by Dr. Daniel Gould^{7,8} and Dr. Ketra Armstrong⁵:

- Conducting observations and interviews with key stakeholders of “exemplar” schools with highest percentages of girls’ sport participation and of schools in need with lowest percentages of girls’ sport participation to better understand which factors are associated with maximizing girls’ involvement and inhibiting participation and barriers to involvement, respectively
- Guiding more targeted, in-depth research efforts to better understand the needs and experiences of under-resourced communities situated in different geographic settings
- Exploring potential social and/or cultural considerations impacting girls’ sport participation within communities in need and those with low participation rates through context-specific, culturally sensitive efforts
- Elucidating the unique ways in which gender inequity is experienced differently for women leaders in sport based on their intersecting identities of race/ethnicity, age, ability, social class, and others.
- Engaging in research that further illuminates the roles and implications of male allies in creating and supporting the leadership of women in sport

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